

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

either alone or with common mongooses and maintained very good health on a mixed diet of fish, snail-flesh and banana.

CRABEATING MONGOOSE (*Herpestes urva*). An adult male of this species received in the Park on 24-i-1965 died on 11-i-1975, i.e. after 9 years, 11 months and 19 days. The estimated age at the time of death was about 12 years. It was living in an enclosure having a cemented floor space of approximately 5.25 sq. metres and was provided with a wooden sleeping box and a water trough. It was kept with two females of the same species from 1971 onwards. As already reported by Acharjyo & Misra (1972) it maintained excellent

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CUTTACK 1,
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health on a diet of fish and snails.

Prater (1971) states that the smaller species of mongooses like the Small Indian Mongoose live from seven to eight years, whilst the larger forms like the big Stripednecked Mongoose, may have a life span of 13 years and more. The life span of the genus *Herpestes* is given as 7 to 12½ years (Walker *et al.* 1964). Longevity records of these two species are not given by Crandall (1965). According to Blanford (1888-91) fruit is sometimes included in the diet of the Indian Mongoose, but this could not be supported by Crandall (*loc. cit.*).

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6. SOME RIDDLES OF GAME BIRD MIGRATION IN KUTCH-2

It is almost two decades, since I wrote the first note (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 54:466-468; 1957). This instalment gives some further information on other migratory birds. Of the three, namely Imperial Grouse [*Pterocles ori-*

entalis (Linn.)], Waku Grouse [*Pterocles senegallus* (Linn.)] and duck dealt with in my first article, the position has not changed except that I have noticed a large collection of duck this year in Banni where there are vast

areas under rain water; but in inland tanks very few birds are to be seen.

The other four migratory birds I am now writing about, are the Houbara [*Chlamydotis undulata macqueenii* (Gray)], the Florican [*Sypheotides indica* (Miller)], Comb Duck [*Sarkidiornis melanotos melanotos* (Pennant)] and Lesser Flamingo [*Phoeniconaias minor* (Geoffrey)]. While I have noticed over many years that the numbers of the Houbara have been dwindling from year to year, this year shows a very sharp decrease, so much so that I fear this species is on the verge of extinction. Houbaras are regular winter visitors to Kutch and a normal bag of 6 to 12 in a day's shoot was considered quite normal; and anything from 20 to 50 birds were seen in a day's hunt. This year in all the areas favoured by these birds (which covers over 300 sq. miles) not more than 12 to 15 birds have been seen. In a normal year one expects to see about 100 to 150 birds over this area.

The migration of the Florican no doubt depends on the rainfall, since they come to Kutch in the rainy season. When the rains are good and timely, they come in good numbers and breed here. 30 to 40 birds can be seen in a day. This year, in spite of good rains and suitable conditions practically no bird was observed! Both these birds are apparently well on the way to extinction! At any rate they are not coming to Kutch as they did before.

On the other hand both Comb Duck and Lesser Flamingo seem to have done well. Both breed in Kutch, when conditions are favourable. I saw quite a few birds (with half grown

chicks puddling in the creek near Pacham Island—just near India Bridge; I did not see any flamingo of the larger variety. The Lesser are easily distinguished from their larger cousins by being so very pink. The half grown chicks are greyish black, with no trace of pink. They were quite at a distance and I could not say whether the half grown birds could fly. But I think not.

The Comb Duck seem to have bred all over Kutch this year. In practically all the tanks including small tanks near the villages, I saw chicks—quite small and unable to fly—with the parent birds all around Bhuj and in the Lakhpat district.

Of course the local game such as the Grey Partridge, Black Partridge, Hare and Chinkara are persecuted mercilessly, and sold in the market. Today's true sportsmen in Kutch have to content themselves with reading the records of what was once available for sport, in this country, described by Dr Sálím Ali as 'Sportsman's Paradise' in the book he wrote in 1945 on BIRDS OF KUTCH. If the local and residential game is not given protection, they will disappear and therefore, the implementation of game laws is essential, before it is too late!

As it is, four migratory birds have stopped coming: Imperial Sandgrouse and Greylag Geese completely and the Houbara with the Florican almost. It will be interesting to find out whether the numbers of these birds has also been affected in the neighbouring territories such as Rajasthan and Saurashtra.

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PALACE,
BHUJ, KUTCH,
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